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SUBJECT: IRAQI MEDIA DEVELOPMENTS IN NOVEMBER:
KURDISH INDEPENDENT SATELLITE RADIO STARTS UP, NEW
POLLING AND MEDIA MONITORING ACTIVITY

LONDON FOR ARABIC MEDIA UNIT

(A) FBIS/OSC GMP20051109542002; (B) FBIS/OSC
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[11](#). (SBU) Summary and Comment. Iraq's media sector remains extremely active, reflecting the unsettled political situation as different parties and candidates clamor to project their voices to a skeptical but highly politicized public. November saw a new effort at independent broadcasting for Kurdish audiences and a new media monitoring service to cover elections. Papers published more "polls" to illustrate editorial points or to project standings of electoral candidates, with some consequently drawing fire from those who disagreed with their "findings." The media itself made news, with an introspective review of managerial shortcomings in the independent Kurdish-language Hawlati, and accusations of biased reporting or unethical media practices coming in several other outlets. End Summary and Comment.

New Radio Station, Media Monitoring Service

[12](#). (U) On November 9, Nawa Radio, an Iraqi radio station broadcasting in Kurdish and Arabic, began transmitting via the Hotbird satellite, according to the station's website at www.nawartv.com. This is the first satellite radio we are aware of in Iraq, and it may reflect an effort to overcome the difficulty of FM broadcasting in Kuridsh areas, where mountains restrict the range of FM transmitters significantly. The website boasts that "Nawa is an independent Iraqi national radio network that aims to produce objective, uncensored news and to serve as a platform for political discussion." FBIS reports (ref A) that Nawa Satellite Radio broadcasts 24 hours a day, and that FM broadcasting began in January 2005 from Baghdad, Mosul, Sulimaniya, and Kirkuk. The producers indicated that they are also planning further projects, including newspapers, magazines, and satellite TV.

[13](#). (U) The week of November 15, the Iraqi NGO Mirat4 announced that it would begin media monitoring in Iraq. The NGO indicated it would initially focus on elections, and that it intended to publish its first products at a press conference December 1, with another projected after December 15 elections.

Polls Draw Fire

[14](#). (SBU) Iraqi media outlets are increasingly citing "polls" to report on trends or to boost their own party's standings. Methods and reliability are impossible to gauge, as evidenced by widely divergent results, although independent outlets are seen as more likely to present credible results than party organs. Some polls have apparently touched a nerve and provoked threats against editors.

[15](#). (SBU) Polls on the Cairo Reconciliation Conference have varied widely, as have polls on the likely prospects for various electoral candidates. A survey on the website of the largely independent Al-Sabah, with its occasional secular Shia slant, on November 24 reported that only 17% of Iraqis responding felt that the "Cairo conference will contribute to Iraq's security," while 75.98% believed it will not improve the situation. 7% had no opinion. On the other hand, on November 23, opposition Al-Fourat newspaper published a poll noting "Iraqis Optimistic Over Dialogue and Conference Success." The paper reported that 93% were optimistic, 5% skeptical due to hasty preparation, while 2% declined to give their opinion.

16. (SBU) On November 19 Reuters published a poll allegedly conducted and published by Bayyna newspaper (Hezbollah Iraq party organ, pro-government) in six of Iraq's 18 provinces, including Baghdad, Basra and Mosul. Of the 38,500 said to have been polled, 51 percent reportedly said they wanted Ja'afari to remain as PM. Mithal al-Alusi, a secular Sunni who heads his own election list, drew 21 percent in that tally, with former PM Allawi in third place.

17. (SBU) On November 15, a senior official at a major newspaper called to inform us that, after his paper published a front-page internet poll the previous day showing the relative popularity of potential PM candidates (Allawi, Chalabi, Ja'afari, and Mehdi, in descending order), he received a "strong hint" to stop running the poll, and he asked PAOff if the U.S. could provide some protection or assistance, explaining that the current Iraqi government apparently took umbrage at the low showing reported for the PM (22%) relative to Allawi (40%) or Chalabi (30%). Although the paper is part of the Iraq Media Network set up by CPA, it has been feeling heat from the government in recent months to control its editorial line. On November 25, the editor told PAOff that the Prime Minister had actually pressed for his resignation, but he pushed back and won. The editor suggested he was the first editor in chief in the Arab world to have survived such a tug-of-war with a sitting Prime Minister.

18. (SBU) Al-Bayyan on November 17 reported the results of another survey that "Most Iraqis are Dissatisfied with Sentences Against Terrorists." Bayyan reported that a survey carried out by the Iraqi Archive Institution among more than 700 Iraqis of different backgrounds showed that 76.8% expressed dismay at trial sentences handed out to terrorists, 19.5% were content, and 3.7% had no opinion. (Comment: There is no information about judicial sentences in the public domain, indeed, papers do not report trials or convictions at all, and most Iraqis rely on word of mouth rumors.)

Media as News - Kurdish Paper Airs Its Own Dirty Laundry

19. (U) Increasingly, the media itself was the focus of news. We discovered November 15 that the editor of Hawlati (the only independent media voice in the Kurdish areas of Iraq) Asos Hardi had resigned in early November, along with ten colleagues. Unusually, the paper publicized its problems. By publishing Asos' letter of resignation November 17, Hawlati paper shed light on problems confronting most Iraqi media: "I wished to leave the newspaper of my own free will. . . something that defies a tradition where leaders are either forced to resign or stay until death. . . . An administrative crisis emerged because none of us had any experience managing an independent newspaper. At the time [of our founding five years ago] we only had media outlets of political parties. We needed a system which provided not just transparency, but a proper mechanism to prevent the concentration of power in the hand of one person. Unfortunately we could not fulfill this ambition." In a meeting with Kirkuk poloff, the new editor indicated that his predecessor had been worn out fighting "defamation of character" lawsuits submitted by the two Kurdish political parties. He attributes this to the paper's attempt to keep a neutral political editorial line.

10. (U) The media began to finger its competition for unethical practices to promote political agendas. In late November, al-Bayyan (Da'wa party) criticized al-Zawra, Al-Hurra, and Baghdad satellite television channels for exaggerating detainee torture "to discredit the Unified Iraqi Coalition." On November 22, Sunni electoral candidate Mithal al-Alusi gave a phone interview to (Da'wa party paper) Al-Bayyinah, in which he described Allawi as "the protector of the Ba'th" and challenged him to a televised debate. Al-Zawra on November 22 published a column by Abd-al-Amir al-Majar commenting on recent reports that the US Embassy in London bribed a number of Iraqi and Arab journalists to "promote the US effort" in Iraq.

11. (SBU) As usual, websites took more liberties than other outlets, which continue to face threats and intimidation. Sawt-al-Iraq website, produced by

Fayli (Shia) Kurds, discussed abuse of the media by political parties and candidates. On November 22, they wrote: "When the previous electoral campaigns commenced, the interim Prime Minister, Ayad Allawi, abused his post by exploiting public funds for his campaign. This included paying channels like LBC and al-Arabiyah, that showed his campaign around the clock, as well as USD10 million to fund the production of a biography similar to that of [Saddam] on Al-Arabiyah. Millions of dollars from public funds were spent. But we don't see Al-Arabiyah or any Lebanese channel showing campaigns for Prime Minister Al-Ja'afari, who has had to rely on the free public service messages provided by official channel (al-Iraqiya) to all lists. There is a huge difference between a ruler who serves his people and a ruler who serves his interests by exploiting his people." (NOTE: Prime Minister Ja'afari has made liberal, some would say excessive, use of al-Iraqiya to highlight the successes of his government.)

Sad Footnote

[12](#). (U) One of Iraq's most famous political cartoonists, Mouayad Na'amah, died November 27 in Baghdad of a heart attack. Na'amah at the time of his death was still publishing in independent al-Mada newspaper, where he received countless threats from insurgents for his strongly critical depictions of Zargawi and al-Qaida. During Saddam's era, he also drew fire for his cartoons, which always pushed the edge of what was tolerated in the press.

SATTERFIELD